



Gloves Off is a powerful verse novel about hope and resilience from acclaimed author Louisa Reid. Mercilessly bullied at school for her weight, Lily feels like a loser at life. Exploring what it's like to be bullied, ***Gloves Off*** traces Lily's journey from victim to victor. Carnegie-nominated and a Sunday Times Children's Book of the Week, ***Gloves Off*** has garnered widespread praise from reviewers and readers alike. Wrecked, Louisa's second verse novel, is out in September 2020.

After a particularly terrible bullying incident, Lily's dad determines to give his daughter the tools to fight back. Introducing her to boxing, he encourages Lily to find her own worth. It is both difficult and challenging but in confronting her own fears she finds a way through that illuminates her life and friendships.

Meeting Rose, and seeing that there is another world out there, enables her to live her own life fully and gives her the knowledge that she is both beautiful and worth it.

LOUISA REID has spent most of her life reading. And when she's not doing that she's writing stories, or imagining writing them at least. An English teacher, her favourite part of the job is sharing her love of reading and writing with her pupils. Louisa lives with her family in the north-west of England and is proud to call a place near Manchester home.



Louisa writes about things that she thinks are important to young people, and all people generally, really.

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'Beautiful, brave and inspiring'
Lisa Williamson

'This is a knock-out'
i newspaper



EXTRACT 1: Bullied (extract taken from 'Roadkill', 'Rescue' and 'Run, Rabbit')

Objectives: Discuss how it feels to be the victim of bullying. If you've never been bullied, what do you imagine it feels like? Can you empathise? In what sort of scenarios have you felt picked on or afraid? How did it make you feel?

- What is interesting about the narrative voice in the opening pages of the story?
- What stylistic choices has the writer made to engage the reader?
- How does the writer convey Lily's feelings?
- What do you understand by the title 'Roadkill'? How does this relate Lily's feelings?

Can you think of any particular groups in society who become the victims of bullies? There are lots of instances of bullying in *Gloves Off* - who are the bullies in this novel, and who are the victims? In what areas or walks of life does bullying happen? Are there different ways to be bullied? Why do people bully others? Can you feel any empathy or understanding for a bully? What can you do if you see someone being bullied?

Create a poem entitled 'The Bully ...' written from the perspective of either bully or victim.

Subjects: Design Art and Technology, PSHE, Creative Writing: Poetry, Writing in Role

EXTRACT 2: Police (taken from "Morning" and 'Jaws' and 'Feet Under the Table')

Objectives: Explore your attitude to the police; why do you feel the way you do about them? How are the police represented by the media? Could we be a society without a police force?

- What do you feel about Uncle Ray?
- How does Ray use his power?
- Does he change in the novel? If so, why?
- Find articles in the news which represent the police in either positive or negative lights. Share your articles and discuss the way the police have been portrayed.
- Do we need a police force?



Write a speech in which you argue for or against this idea:

“The police should be abolished. They no longer have any place in our society.”

Subjects: Design Art and Technology, PSHE, Speaking and Listening, Creative Writing: Writing to Argue

EXTRACT 3: Revolution (taken from ‘And I Get Up Again’, ‘Resolutions’ and ‘Hard’)

Objectives: Explore the idea of revolution - its causes and consequences; use hot seat-ing to explore how this idea applies to Lily.

- In role as Lily, think about what she is thinking and feeling in the extracts you have read.
- Hot seat Lily and ask her about her motivations, hopes and fears.
- Lily retaliates against Aidan with violence. How could this have been avoided? What would you have done?
- Devise a new scene that could have featured in the novel and which explores the idea of revolution: rehearse and present your scene. Do not include violence.

How have societies and individuals historically revolted against injustice? Research a revolution from the past (can be recent past eg the Arab Spring) and present your findings to the class.

Subjects: Drama, PSHE, Speaking and Listening, Design Art and Technology, Literacy, History

EXTRACT 4: Forgiveness (extracts taken from ‘Don’t Let Me Down’, ‘No Reply’ and ‘Leaving’)

Objectives: Explore how the theme of forgiveness is presented in the story; write a letter from the perspective of a character asking for forgiveness.

- Discuss: How difficult or easy is forgiveness?
- How many times can you forgive someone? Is there a limit?
- Have you ever forgiven someone for something and regretted it?
- Have you ever not forgiven someone and regretted it?
- How can someone prove they are truly sorry? Should they have to?
- In *Gloves Off* the characters treat each other in many harmful ways.



Brainstorm all the things that the characters need to forgive each other for.

- Are some of the events/actions unforgiveable?
- Is any human ever irredeemable?

In character, write a letter from Ryan, Rose, Ray, or Lily (or any character or your choosing) asking another character for forgiveness.

Subjects: Literacy, PSHE, Speaking and Listening, Creative Writing: Writing a letter, Writing in Role



EXTRACT 1: Bullied (extract taken from 'Roadkill', 'Rescue' and 'Run, Rabbit')

ROADKILL

i taste the street –

it's filthy,

gritty and hard,

and it has

knocked

all the

breath

out of my body.

slammed low,

i grope for my bag,

stinging shame in my palms,

on my knees,

and my chin.

i don't get up.



i stare at the ground,

something in my eye.

RESCUE

waiting for the thunder of feet to fade,

for the taunts to be swallowed

by the blare and shout of traffic –

who finds me?

who scrapes me off the street

and helps me home?

(oh, god,

how long did i

lie

there?)

i don't like to be



SEEN.

and – like *that* –

SPOTTED

at my worst.

i like to pretend

that no one knows

who i am,

that i'm hiding well,

hiding here,

in front of you –

invisible,

nevertheless.

but when you're

down and out,

knocked

on the ground,

crumpled –

it's clear that someone put you there,

and that you didn't fight back.



too weak.

too wet.

even so,

i remember to say thank you

to the woman who drives me home.

manners cost nothing.

RUN, RABBIT

the varnish picked clean away,

i chew my nails,

wonder, should i leave?

mollie dances towards me,

pulls my hands and drags me up and off my chair,



into the crush.

out of the edges, out of the darkness,

i totter centre stage

the beat thuds

i like the boom of it,

catch the rhythm,

move my feet and hands and arms,

begin to

twist and dance beside my friend –

next to her no one will notice me.

but kids from my year

circle near,

clapping, smiling,

jumping to the beat.

“go lily, go lily!”

what?

my skin prickles

i look for the door



mollie steps back, becomes the crowd, lost –

i can't catch her eye.

another face

aidan vaine.

he dances closer

so

i step away

he shakes his head

and pulls me in.

panic.

heat

spreading

over

my

cheeks

and

neck,

itchy



and

red

panic

crawling

up

and

over

my

chest.

“come on, let’s see you dance,”

he says,

and –

when nothing happens –

except that he just nods

and smiles – a smile that is not a smile,

a smile that threatens more than it could say –

i hesitate,

then



decide

okay.

what choice do i have?

aidan gets closer.

i've never liked him,

never, ever could.

but everyone is watching,

and everyone will see

that maybe it's okay

to like a girl like me.

aidan plays football,

thinks he's a man.

he's all mouth and muscles,

there's stubble on his chin.



everyone hears about the girls

he says he's had.

and the things he's done on a friday night

drunk

and

high.

time i

sidle off,

sit down,

safe,

because right now

vertigo strikes –

i wobble,

almost fall

but he isn't letting go.

he's closer still,

his breath on my cheek

sour, not sweet –



warning signs.

he smells of drink.

i lean away from the scratch of his skin

the thickness of his face,

and heavy breath.

but he's moving nearer, stretching towards me,

towering over me.

it is the first time a boy has

touched me like this,

been so close.

well.

(unless you count that time

last year

another party here,

they're all watching porn.

her brother

pushing your hand

into his pants.



you freeze.

you

do not know

if you have the right

to **scream**.)

backing away

i think i'm smiling,

even as my heart hammers

because

he'll feel the sweat on my skin,

the bulges at my waist,

he will know,

if he touches me

everything i hide.

(he knows already,

fool –

didn't he hurt you

on your way home

from school?)



i force myself to last

another second

and another.

look into darkness and it stares right back –

with an eye that

blazes,

angry and alive.

aidan's arms are tighter, he's welded to me now,

as the beat explodes,

and i'm crushed into his bones

the music

rises,

it's pulsing, pounding,

juttering and demanding,

and aidan has me around my waist.

he's shouting like he's having fun,

a whoop!



another!

faces leer,

fists punch the air, as they close in

on him

on us.

hands and hips and mouths,

making gestures,

something foul,

obscene.

something i wish i hadn't seen.

and aidan's laughing,

then whispering in my ear.

what is it?

he's still holding on.

what? I say.

lean back, away.



he laughs.

he smells of dead things

of the alley near our house

of the leaves

and the gutter

and i can smell my own fear

its stink on my skin.

he's swinging

me

round and round

“Yee Ha!” he cries,

“Yee Ha!”

and i shrug and struggle,

but i cannot throw him off,

he's got my clothes, my flesh

my body in his hands



and he's pulling and grabbing, riding me –

on my back, so heavy he's crushing me,

bucking

and squeezing

buttons popping

my brain exploding

no one hears me

or knows i'm screaming.

“Yee, Ha!”

he hollers,

as he spins,

and my

feet are tangling, my clothes are tearing,

ripping, in tatters,

i grab at my top,

try to hide my breasts, my flesh



but

he won't let go.

they're roaring, jeering,

bent double, laughing –

and aidan holds on.

how long is it before i get away?

i shake.

face burning

throat raw

eyes streaming.

everyone saw.

i stumble somehow out of there

force my way free.

mollie's disappeared,

but,

i hear her laugh

and crow,



“did you see the state of her?

those shoes!

can you believe she thought

that we actually wanted her here?

the mess of it!”

outside autumn’s arms are thin and cold.

EXTRACT 2: Police (taken from “Morning” and ‘Jaws’ and ‘Feet Under the Table’)

“MORNING,”

he says, sitting there,

feet under the table,

cooked breakfast round his mouth,

mopping up yolk

with a piece of fried bread.

“all right? get the girl some grub, bern. lazy cow,”

he says and laughs,

eyeing me,



no card or present, that's no surprise.

mum steps to the cupboard,

her face grey and pouchy,

yawning behind her hand.

they've talked all night,

his voice echoed

up the stairs,

into my room,

vibrating, deep and low.

he likes the sound of it,

sings karaoke at the weekends,

when he can.

and now this morning

ray is brazen,

has shaved his face

with one of dad's razors.

"she never did pull her weight, eh, lil?"

he laughs at his joke, gestures at my mum,



but i don't smile

or sit down.

“come on then,”

he says to mum,

“get into gear.

get that arse moving, eh?”

ray comes over

when dad's away

and mum

lets him in.

if dad were here,

he'd tell ray to sling his hook.

once i saw mum open her purse

and hand over all she had.

i know his knock.



a hammer.

if no one answers

he calls through the letter box,

then comes round the back,

“i know you’re in there,”

he shouts.

i’m a coward. i make her face him alone.

see you later, mum,

i kiss her goodbye

and slam the door behind me.

uncle ray is

in the police,

you’d think

that you could trust him.

JAWS



mum sends me to the shops

for bits i forgot to buy last time.

i walk with mikey to the Spar,

pockets rattling, heavy with coppers and change.

we wander, wonder

what's to rush home for?

although out here,

in the evening gloom,

i'm not so sure

we're safe.

stick to the main road, mum said,

and i take my cousin's hand.

we talk nonsense,

laugh

at jokes he's heard,

and then

mikey says,



“do you think you’ll be a star?

uncle joe says there’s girls,

girls like you

who win big prizes,

you could get a medal,” he says,

looking up at me as if i’m already gold.

“i’ll come and cheer!” he jumps and laughs,

wafer thin, like aunty clare, a leaf blown on the wind.

not fair.

thanks mike, i say, although i cannot smile –

that wouldn’t happen,

not to me.

“but you can try, at least, can’t you?”

i s’pose, i say, *it’s worth a go*.

(relax your hands, soft hands,

strong wrists – get the right technique,



keep moving, lil –

alone that night, later on

i'll hit the bag, one two, one two.

my arms like sponge, my head in bits.)

at school today

no one talked to me again.

and then,

at lunch, someone

caught me –

i felt the flash –

looked up,

into the camera's eye,

aidan and his mates nearby

and stacey with her girls.

i pushed my plate away,

too late –

the damage done.



so now there i am

all over their screens,

mouth open

fork raised.

minger,

fat cow.

pig,

whale,

so frigging gross –

why don't you just kill yourself?

“lily,” says my cousin

as we approach the shops,

“who’s that boy? over there?”

i don’t need to look

to know.

gripping mikey’s hand tighter,

i pull him with me.

he’s no one,



come on

hurry up –

but i never have been fast enough.

aidan's coming over the road,

dodging cars

side-stepping through traffic,

upon us

smiling,

shark.

shit, i think,

and then,

he s p i t S –

it hits

bullseye.

the traffic drowns what he says next

and i rake my sleeve over my face,

try to wipe him



off my skin,

but it's sinking in,

and his mouth

is open wide

ready to swallow me

whole

as it curves around

all the things he's going to do

as soon as he

gets me

alone.

in here, i say

pulling mike inside a shop,

wishing i could call for help,

but dad's away,

aunty clare's at work

and mum's no use.



we hide amongst the bottles,
amber, red and gold,
the guy behind the till
stares our way,
he won't want to get involved.

aidan is hanging at the door.
biding his time –
no hurry –
“what's happening? lily, let's go home,” mikey whines,
shhh, i say,
just let me think.

there's only uncle ray.

FEET UNDER THE TABLE

i have to be grateful now.

“show your uncle ray



what you've been up to, love,"

says mum, who

is serving beer and stuff she keeps

for dad, his favourite snacks,

and ray is filling his face.

now it's up to me to show how thankful i am, too.

mum looks as if she might disintegrate

crumble like pastry

like a slice of stale cake,

if i can't be strong right now

and take him away.

he grins at the punchbag,

grabs it, holds it fast.

"show us what you've got then, lil."

he watches, with folded arms

as i pull on the gloves

demonstrate my



weakness,

swiping

at my enemies

arms melting

legs shaking

belly a puddle of curdled milk.

ray laughs and

pulls on dad's gloves.

“you're going to have to do better

than **that**.

come on, hit me, make it hard.”

he dances in front of me –

ducking

weaving

mocking,

beckoning me on,



and i try to catch him –
but i'm just so tired
of trying,
and even though i hate him
it's not enough.

“come on, fatty
come on, loser
come on, big girl,
catch me if you can.”

ray's a big man.
and when he belts me
on the side of my head
i'm down
and i don't get up.

EXTRACT 3: Revolution (taken from 'And I Get Up Again', 'Resolutions' and 'Hard')



AND I GET UP AGAIN

when i'm strong

and fast

and hard

i will select the thing

for its weight,

for the heft

and strike.

i stare at all the stuff

dad keeps at the back of the shed

the lines of tools,

sharp and blunt –

weapons.

i plan that i will take an iron bar,

i will walk along these streets

and lie in wait

near the school.

and when i see them



i will inflict

all the pain i've ever felt.

it will hurt them.

and i won't care.

reaching out i lift

an axe.

it drags on my arm

pulls me

low and slow.

dropping it, i walk away

feeling sick

at the thought of

all the blood i could spill.

RESOLUTIONS

repeat after me.



i am going to be the girl

who rises up

out of the mud

out of the gutter

out of silence

out of a void that has been carved for me,

an absence of destiny.

i have taken my rage

and i am eating it,

i am making something of it,

a self

that sings

a tune,

that one day everyone will hear.

there is revolution in me:

a great rushing thing

that drags me forward,



and i like the way it sweeps me up,

a tide,

a surge of blood,

that pulses with intent.

i am going to be the girl

who rises up

out of the mud

out of the gutter

out of silence

out of a void that has been carved for me,

i am a girl

i own my destiny.

HARD

miss moves us around –

she thinks she can –

delighted with this,



her new seating plan.

is she insane

hasn't she seen?

the way that he taunts me

from across the room?

now aidan's beside me

my stomach sickens,

he sniggers and shouts

argues, won't listen.

he kicks his chair

then slumps down at last,

swearing under his breath

gestures at me, then the class

laughs along,

thinks he's funny

i shuffle away,



thinking of running.

then he reaches out

and lifts up my pen

chucks it to stacey

sniggers again.

stop it, i say

give my stuff back.

“fuck off,” he says,

“you stupid fat slag.”

he starts flinging my books

as the teacher protests,

laughs in her face

he knows she’s no threat,

“pig girl,” he says,

“come on, suck my dick.”

shows me his crotch,



“you crap bitch,

fat girl wants it,”

he calls out to his mates.

my face is burning,

my body shakes.

get lost, i scream,

what's the matter with you?

but it's here, it's happening,

i know what to do.

he goes for my neck

tries to pull my head low,

wants to bury me there

wants to put on a show.

but i push and i shove

the desk topples, the chairs,

i use my shoulders, my feet,



as all my rage flares,

because this isn't happening –

not even once more –

i'm not a victim

time to even the score,

and

so,

i

swing and i **smash**

the whole room explodes

in shouts of delight,

nobody knows

who i am any more –

that i have a plan –



that i've played this one out

and won time and again.

"oh my god! look at her!

fight! go on! fight!"

aidan is coming for me,

won't let this lie.

his nose is bleeding,

still, he grabs and he lunges,

i duck and i dodge,

watch as he stumbles,

and because he's off guard

he doesn't know what to do,

he thinks he's too hard

doesn't know that i grew

harder than him,

wear a shell like a shield,



but he won't give in

he's not going to yield,

miss is crying and shrieking,

and trying to end

what is only beginning,

but if i want to send

them a message

that this stops NOW

i will have to go further

before i fall down.

jane's voice in my head –

that i'm worth something too,

dad's got my back,

and i swing through

with a hard left hook

follow through with a jab



he staggers backwards

didn't know i could stab.

my fists are on fire,

my monster is out,

he'll never dare touch me

not after this bout.

faster and faster

my fists start to bleed,

but i don't feel them hurting

he can't take my speed.

i'm only just starting,

want to go all the way,

want to make him see clearly

now i'm having my say,

but it's over so quickly

when someone catches my arm



and they're pulling me away

before i do harm.

it's what he deserves

why can't you see?

why shouldn't i fight back?

they won't let me be.

"for god's sake stop it!"

aidan's still on the floor

cradling his nose

but i want to do more –

blood will have blood,

isn't that the right line?

now it is true

this is my time.

i did it, i got him

and i could do it again.



i stand in the hallway,

feeling no shame.

EXTRACT 4: Forgiveness (extracts taken from 'Don't Let Me Down', 'No Reply' and 'Leaving')

DON'T LET ME DOWN

but,

it's my fight,

i tell mum.

had i really been expecting her to come?

"i'm sorry,

she says,

"i don't think i can bear

to see you get hurt.

i can't stand blood

you know that, lil."

you've got to come,

why didn't you tell me before?



“i did,”

she says.

mum is hiding in her sewing room,

dad’s waiting for me

downstairs.

if i’m late jane will go spare.

mum pins the material she’s working on

and holds it up to the light,

not looking at me,

pretending

it’s all right

for her to let me down.

i don’t say again.

i don’t say for the millionth time

i don’t say

For All My Life.

“you don’t really

want me



there,

and that's fine.

aunty clare will come.

and your uncle ray."

i pull a face.

great

"just you take care tonight,

that's all,

and do yourself proud."

(proud is what

i'd like

her to be.

of herself,

and me.)

NO REPLY

rosie has her back to me.



when finally she turns

so i can see what i've done

i suck in my breath.

“congratulations, lil,

good fight,

i guess the best girl won.”

her swollen eye is already glowing

with bruises

that i recognize – i've worn them too

and feel the throb and stab as if it is my own;

smashed nose,

the blood still smeared around her face,

but it's the look in her eyes that hurts the most.

i think i screwed up,

i think i really hurt her

in a way that wasn't right.



i didn't mean it,

is all i have the guts to say.

she shrugs, as if it's nothing, forces a smile

and i don't dare touch her,

as a million miles open up between us.

suddenly the world is very large

and i am very small.

it spins,

as rosie picks up her things,

this doesn't change things, does it?

i call,

and listen to her answer me,

by saying nothing

at all.

LEAVING



“are you going to prom?”

mollie asks

finding herself beside me.

word got round –

someone saw me

in the ring

and all the blood that

i left there,

rosie’s blood,

which i never meant to spill,

follows me

wherever i go.

why would you care?

“i don’t,” she says, and turns away,

turns again, to face me –

“but aidan, right, you know,

he’s not coming back.”



and a small sort of smile

appears on her face.

“that’s good right, lil?”